21: Credner K-5 (1927-1929) 1935 AO1 Thailand Ao1
Semang ANT
Karen AP7

(p. 267a)

Plate 13

[opp. 152]

T
563
S
172
411
291

Abb. 19 Peninsular Siam, Semang. Representatives of the Primitive Forest Collecting Peoples.

The spiral hair of the Negroids is clearly recognizable. The man carries a blowpipe as his weapon. Koke Bodi Pattani. Photograph: E. Groote, May 1929.

T
563
K
291
824
482

Abb. 20. Northern Siam, White Karen, Representatives of the Forest Hoe-Culture Peoples. The jacket of the woman, adorned with beautiful patterns consisting of Colix lachryma (Job's tears) seeds sewn to it. Between Chiangmai and Maehongson. Photograph: W. Credner, December 27, 1928.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

and the fulness tucked in at the waist line, thus allowing the action of the knees. The garment remains in place remarkably well, although no belt is used. When the women bathe—those on the plains doing so with much more regularity than their sisters in the hills—they bring the top of the skirt up under the armpits and fasten it over the breasts in the same manner as about the waist.

The jackets or smocks of the women present a variety of designs. The most common is the plain black or dark blue "hse" with little or no ornament on it. Sometimes it is decorated with small rosettes or stars of colored yarns or, among the Pwo, with fern-like figures. The prettiest decorations are made with the hard white seeds of various shapes of the plant called Job's Tears *(Coix)*. The variety mostly used are those resembling barberries, called "bwe" in Sgaw Karen and found all over the hills. These are sewed on the finished garment in parallel rows, in rows forming V-shaped figures, or in the forms of stars or rosettes and edging the arm and neck holes. Red yarns or pieces of red cloth are also sewed on to add to the ornamentation. In Shwegyin we often see a "hse" that is woven with elaborate designs of red and green on a black ground, red tape being sewed in vertical lines on the body of the garment and in horizontal lines over the shoulders. The head-dress of the women is called "hko peu ki" and among the Sgaw women consists of a piece of cloth about two yards long and a foot wide. The middle part is plain white. At either end there is a fancy woven ("u") portion about twenty inches long, red in color and crossed at intervals of two inches by transverse lines. In the middle of these colored ends is a white zigzag line representing a serpent. The other lines are in pairs, those equidistant from the zigzag above and below being alike and having their special designations. These names are, however, in archaic form, and their meaning is not well known. There are long white fringes on the ends of the head-dress and shorter colored ones at the ends of the cross lines. When worn, it is twisted about the head in such a way as to form a peak over the forehead with the colored fringes hanging down about the eyes and the long white fringes down the back. In a few villages in the Pegu Hills the women wear circlets ("hko hhlaw") of bamboo or silver, around which they coil their hair. The metal circlets are made of beaten silver a scant inch in width and long enough to go once and a half around the head, being held

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

10. *Hsi hsa*, the month of a little starlight, when the stars begin to show themselves occasionally. It corresponds to the Burmese *Thadingyut* and to the moon of October.

11. *La naw*, the month of the "naw," when from the seeds of this small plant is extracted an oil much like sessimum oil. It is equivalent to the Burmese *Tezaungmon* and to the moon of November.

12. *La plü*, the month of eclipses, when the moon dies and hence the month for funeral ceremonies. It corresponds to the Burmese *Nadaw* and to the moon of December.

It will be noticed that in the list as given above the seventh and eighth months are numbered 6 and 7, respectively. Two suggestions have been made to explain this incongruity. One of these is Dr. Mason's suggestion to the effect that originally the first month was *La plü* (December), which would not only correct the incongruity, but also make the Karen calendar correspond to that of Tibet, which begins with December.[3] The other explanation was given to me by a Karen teacher, who says that the month of *La hkli* (April) is the one that is repeated every three years in order to correct the calendar, and that the periodic interposition of this extra month is responsible for the names of the seventh and eighth months and the disagreement of those names with their serial numbers in the list. To me this explanation seems very dubious. One Karen writer attempts to correct the incongruity between the seventh and eighth months and their serial numbers by proposing to transfer *La hkü* (August) from its generally accepted position in the list to a place before the seventh month, but, of course, this is not a feasible change. As many Karens associate the month for funeral ceremonies *(La plü)* with the end of the year, they do not think it should be shifted into first place in the calendar.

The Days of the Week

Few of the Karen people can tell the days of the week, except according to Burmese or Christian nomenclature. Several old men have given me names for the days, which, they say, were in use a long time ago. There are seven of these, as may be seen in the following tabulation:

[3] *Journal, Asiatic Society of Bengal*, Vol. XXXVII, 42.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

The Continuity of Life

761
775
824

The Karen do not appear to have conceived the idea of an immortal life. They speak of "k' las" in "plu" (hades) as dying, when the "k' las" are believed to entêr an intermediate stage of existence, becoming "agheu." These "agheu" are represented as something like eggs or bladders filled with a vaporous substance. When, later, these vapor-filled objects burst, their contents spread over the fields; and the developing flowers of the paddy and other plants are thereby fertilized, for the vapor contains the fructifying principle. When the grain is eaten as food, its life-giving power is communicated to the blood. Thence, it is imparted to the seminal fluid, by means of which men and animals are enabled to propagate life. The transmission of life from shades or ghosts back to life again is expressed in Karen speech by the root "lo," which signifies to expose or open one thing to the influence of another. Inasmuch as the fecundating of the paddy takes place in the rainy season, the "Law hpo," a company of demons who regulate the rainfall, are supposed to act as agents in bringing it about. When the kernels are forming in the heads of the paddy, the Karen are wont to say: "Bu deu htaw li," which means literally, "The paddy has conceived." [18]

[18] See Chapter XXII on Supernatural and Mythical Beings, p. 230.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

made to them lest their anger should be aroused by some untoward act on the part of men. Their special task is to preside over births. Their king occupies himself with the creation of men, but, being interrupted continually by various demands upon his attention, he turns out many defectives, cripples, and badly colored ones. This poor workmanship led men in the past to revile the "Mü xa," who, consequently, no longer show themselves to mortals. They have the power to unite the souls of those whom they have predestined to marry. Those thus paired are vouchsafed prosperous and happy lives; but if they succeed in mating with others than those intended for them, incompatibility and adversity surely follow. The "Mü xa" are often addressed as though they were the parents of mankind and appear to hold places comparable to that of Zeus or Jupiter among the gods of the ancient Greeks and Romans. They are often spoken of in Karen lore as dwelling on Mount "Thaw Thi," as Zeus in Greek mythology had his abode on Mount Olympus.[2] In the celebration of family rites and feasts the "Mü xa" are recognized by having words addressed to them, although the family spirits, commonly designated as "Bgha," are often thought of as the powers to be propitiated at this ceremony. In some sections of the country the "parents of mankind" are supposed to receive offerings in their extended hands, which are thereby cleansed. They are then expected to return to their celestial abode, the hope being that they will not descend again to the dwelling-place of mortals, lest, by some mischance, they should become offended and bring misfortune upon men. They are believed to be able to assume any form they wish and to render themselves visible or invisible at will.[3]

One member of this group, called "Mü xa hkleu," is thought to preside over the much-venerated banyan *(Ficus religiost)*. It was under a banyan tree that Gautama Buddha received his enlightenment. The banyan is, however, held sacred by most of the tribes of Indo-China, even though they are not Buddhists. No doubt the wonderful vitality of the seeds of this tree which germinate anywhere, especially in the crotches of other trees and in the head of the palm, later enveloping, killing, and thriving on its host, has helped to evoke the veneration of the peoples familiar with the banyan. According to the Karen legends, the rhinoceros ("ta do hkaw") is the beast on which the guardian spirit of the banyan tree is accustomed

[2] See Chapter XXV in regard to Mount "Thaw Thi," pp. 262-264.
[3] For a description of the rites tendered to the "Mü xa" see pp. 248, 254, 260.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

to ride when searching for the "k' las" of human beings. Any person who kills one of these animals arouses the enmity of the spirit.

The "Hti k' sa kaw k' sa," or "lords of the water and land," or "lords of the earth," are the deities who rule over the lands of the earth. They are superior to the spirits that preside over rivers and mountains and have tempers that are easily disturbed. Ill-spoken words, as well as improper and immoral actions, easily offend them; and they take vengeance on persons guilty of such misdemeanors by sending tigers, snakes, and various illnesses upon them. They are sometimes confused with the king of hades, who also passes judgment on the sins of mortals. One way to avoid angering the lords of the earth is to scrape a little rice from the top of the pot while cooking and lay it aside as an offering to them. Concerning their relation to these divinities, the people say that if they transgress in their language while in a distant land, the lords of the earth will kill them before dark; but if guilty of swearing or using indecent words in their own country, they can assuage the anger of these spirits by making an offering of rice and water at the foot of a tree and uttering the following prayer: "O Lords of the earth, we are ignorant people. Whatever transgressions we have been guilty of in using harsh or obscene words, do not, O Lords, hold them against us. We will make offerings annually. If we do not die, you shall eat of our food every year and of our children's offerings generation after generation."

[illegible]ry tree, river, lake, and, indeed, almost every natural object is supposed by the Karen to be inhabited by its "k' sa" or divinity. These local spirits, however, are regarded by many as constituting lower orders of the divinities of the first group. When a man selects the location for his field, he must perform certain ceremonies to win their good will. The simplest of these is to place offerings of rice and water at the foot of some large tree in the plot chosen or to go through the ceremonies described in the chapter on Agricultural Pursuits and Other Occupations.[4] There are also the annual sacrifices to these spirits that have been described fully in the chapter on Propitiatory Sacrifices and Healing Offerings, pp. 234, ff.

The nefarious work and character of "Naw k' plaw" or "Mü kaw li" have been sufficiently revealed in the narration of the story of his temptation of the first parents of the Karen race in the

[4] See ante, pp. 76, ff.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

776 older tribes in the country, but have become the common property of the Karen for several generations back.

773 823 The Titan Atlas of the ancient Greeks, supporting a globe, has his counterpart in "Hsi gu maw ya" or "Maw ya," as he is sometimes called. He is a brother of "Y'wa" and holds the world on his shoulders. When he grows weary, he shifts it from one side to the other and thus causes earthquakes. Sometimes the beetles that feed on the refuse of human beings report to him that they are starving, because there are no more people to supply them with food. This so angers him that he shakes himself and produces a series of earth-tremors. As these phenomena are common in Burma, the Karen seek to quiet them by shouting out: "We are still here. We are still here." Work is tabu during the day on which an earthquake occurs.[11]

776 821 The semiannual change of seasons can not but attract the attention of the people living in Burma. For the Karen a company of demons, the "Law," is responsible for the wet season and another group, the "Hku de," for the dry season. The former, who are sometimes named the "Law hpo" (signifying a company of them), are believed to have cities and dwellings in the upper regions, whence they regulate the rainfall and reveal themselves in the thunder and lightning. The flashes of lightning are nothing less than the flapping of their wings and the thunder is the rattle of their flying shafts against their foes, the "Hku de."

824 776 231 The "Law" are also regarded as the source of the fructifying power in all plants and trees that form their fruits in the wet season. The grain is said to be conceiving when the kernels are developing, and the "Law hpo" are said to be the husbands who bring this about. Their function is to provide the plants, especially the paddy which is heading during the latter part of the rainy season, with the "sgheu" (the life-giving principle), that is, the vaporous substance that comes from the land of the dead and revives all life on the earth.[12] The scarcity of domestic animals among the Karen is attributed to these demons, who are alleged to have raised such a stifling dust by shooting their shafts against the rocks that the creatures took refuge in the jungle and became wild before they could be caught again.

831 776 The enemies of the "Law," the "Hku de," are also demons of the upper air with a human appearance, but no abiding-place. Dur-

[11] See Chapter XXVIII on Tabu, p. 289.
[12] See Chapter XXI on Religious Conceptions, p. 225.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

the Karen back in the mythological age, and which the latter carelessly burned when he set fire to the brush that he had cut from his field. What offerings more acceptable to the "Bgha" could be made than the creatures that had absorbed the wisdom of the divine book?[3] That the pig is regarded as a vicarious sacrifice is shown by the rite in which the members of the family touch the side of the animal, while the "Lord of the spirits" is asked to protect them from sickness and sorrow. However, the Karen do not charge the pig with a message to the great spirit, as do the Kenyah and Kayan tribes of Borneo;[4] nor do they put their sins on the pig, as did the ancient Hebrews on the head of the sacrificial bullock or on the scapegoat.[5] In Toungoo the dog is substituted for the pig in the family rites, the tradition there being that it ate some of the fragments of the book of wisdom. The Rev. E. W. Blythe is authority for the statement that the cat is also offered to the "Bgha" in Toungoo.[6] The Bwe and Red Karen tribes, among whom the ox, buffalo, and goat are the common domestic animals, use one or another of these creatures, according to the manifestations obtained through divination.[7] I am told that in Shwegyin there are some localities where the people do not sacrifice animals of any kind, but make offerings of flowers only.

The leaves used in the feasts must be those of the wild plantain ("ya"), which is found everywhere in the jungle throughout Burma; for the tradition is that it was this variety of plantain which "Htaw Meh Pa," the mythical ancestor of the Karen race, cut off in blazing the trail for his people to follow on the way to a more fruitful land.[8]

The miniature house ("hi hpo kheh") is intended as a resting-place for the "Bgha," when it comes to enjoy the feast provided for it. This tiny structure is set in the inner room where the pig is killed, the sacrificial fireplace built, and the feast held. This fireplace is a sacred family altar apart from the place where the cooking is carried on daily. The inner room affords greater privacy to the family during the feasts. The Pwo Karen have special trays and dishes for their feasts, which are kept sacredly for this purpose.

[3] Colonel A. R. MacMahon, *The Karens of the Gold Chersonese*, pp. 140, ff. For the story of the Lost Book see p. 333.

[4] Hose and MacDougall, *Pagan Tribes of Borneo*, Vol. II, pp. 50, ff.

[5] Leviticus, 16:21-23.

[6] Rev. E. W. Blythe in *The Rangoon Diocesan Quarterly*, 1917, p. 9.

[7] E. O'Riley in *Journal, Indian Archipelago*, 1850, p. 16.

[8] See *ante*, p. 5.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

789

kind, involving the use of certain rites, practices, and conceptions by which one tries to protect one's self against unknown powers and forces. White magic may be divided in turn into three varieties, namely, defensive, productive, and prognostic magic.

751 789 825

As suggested by its name, defensive magic is employed to safeguard one from injury and to prolong one's life. Charms are used, such as the wild boar's tusk without a nerve cavity, to prevent the possessor from being wounded by the firing of a gun or the bolt from a crossbow. The tusk charm is called "soh."

The boar's tusk must be the tusk of an old and fierce animal (for the older the animal, the smaller the cavity), which was, therefore, hard to kill. This, according to Karen belief, renders its owner equally hard to destroy. Sometimes the tooth of an ancestor is worn, in order to gain the reputed courage and strength of the latter. A female wears such a charm around her neck. A man may wear it set in a finger-ring. The latter method of wearing the tooth would not serve in the case of a woman or girl, for unavoidably it would be brought in contact with her skirt and that would be disrespectful to the dead, thus destroying the value of the charm. A lock of hair or the parings of nails from a corpse are also frequently worn to prolong the life of the wearer.

[769]

824 789

A certain plant of magic power, called "k' thi baw tho" or "tiger medicine" is said by the Karen to confer such immunity upon him who uses it that he may enter a den of fierce tigers at any time without the least fear.[4] It is also reported that by burying the root of this magic plant at the bottom of a hole seven cubits deep, pulling the root up with one's teeth, and jumping out—according to one of my informants—even when men are standing around the opening with sticks in their hands, one will be turned into a man-eating tiger and spend the remainder of his life in the jungle composing verses and springing down upon unwary persons. Certainly, one who can believe that a man can leap out of so deep a hole and dodge the blows of his fellows at the top, will experience no difficulty in believing the rest of this story.

789 241 824

A second form of white magic is what is defined as productive magic. It has to do with increasing a crop, rendering a family prosperous, or adding children to the family circle. Certain plants of the ginger family *(Zingiberaceae)* growing in Burma are supposed to be endowed with the power of bringing a good crop production. Consequently, they are set out at the entrances of the

[4] *Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, pp. 643, ff.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1923 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

fields. A native reported to me an example of productive magic in connection with the finding of a spiral coil of heavy brass wire by his great aunt. The coil was from four to six inches in diameter and was unearthed by the aunt while digging a large yam in the jungle. The coil was carried home, but at first brought only misfortune. However, in the full moon of "Thadingyut" (Burmese for October) the aunt hit upon the happy idea of offering the blood of a red cock to the spiral coil, and in due time the family became prosperous. A failure to make the annual offering was followed by ill-fortune. The offering must not be made by an unchaste person or by one who had fallen out of the house during the year. The coil, which sometimes assumed human form, must not be approached too closely. It was believed to possess the power of foretelling the future when it appeared in human shape.

The red and yellow varieties of the flowering plant, cockscomb *(Amarantus)*, which grow abundantly in the hills, are reputed to have a beneficial effect on the crops. The red variety has the added virtue, according to various tales, of dazzling the eyes of pursuing spirits, which are so attracted by it that they forget any evil intent they may have had against persons or objects. A root taken from a red cockscomb found growing in a field three years after cultivation, if bound up in the turban of a husband, will prevent the wife from conceiving, according to Karen lore. The opposite result is attained by the women of Shwegyin by wearing the bones of the "Ta t'hkaw hkaw" (a one-legged female demon) as a necklace. They buy these bones from the Brecs.[1]

Black magic is bad magic or witchcraft. The Karen speak of it as "ta ho ta yaw" or sometimes as "ta ho ta lo," meaning to work evil on a person and thereby cause his death. It is difficult to learn very much about the practices involved in the art, for those who exercise it are prone to keep their methods secret, revealing them, if at all, to one or two intimates only and thus preventing their secrets from losing their potency. By blowing on a cup of water that is later to be handed to the intended victim, the worker of black magic imparts to it a baleful action that will cause him to sicken and die. A quid of betel blown upon in the same way may be thrown at the person intended to be harmed, and, if it strikes him, will produce the fatal result desired. Some sorcerers pretend to have the power of inducing a lingering disease, which after a year or two will terminate the life of their victims. Other methods

[1] See Chapter XXII on Supernatural and Mythical Beings, p. 232.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

Certain stones ("ler na") and some plants of the ginger family ("paw na") are credited with having the ability to consume food. If offered raw flesh and blood, they prefer the latter. The owners of such specimens can cause harm to any one against whom they have a grudge. In case one of the "ler na" is sent to a person, it takes on the appearance of the owner and produces the death of the recipient. Such stones, according to report, are usually picked up in swampy places, glow in the dark, and will eat into one's flesh like an acid. It seems to be customary to send one of these carnivorous stones to the intended victim when he is in a weakened condition on account of sickness. He is, therefore, in a physical state to experience such an hallucination as that referred to above.

To counteract the effects of the "ler na," a medicine is compounded from the gall-bladder of one who has suffered a violent death and been stolen from the grave at night. The remains of the gall-bladder are mixed with the charred dust scraped from the bamboos used in piercing the corpse when it was being burned. These ingredients are moistened with water and shaped into a ball, from which the patient takes doses when he finds the spell of the magic stone asserting itself. Other fragments of the medicine-ball are pulverized and scattered in the air about the patient. This internal and external treatment is supposed to afford both cure and protection from the menace of the "ler na."[7] Another method (called "po") of preventing witches and wizards from working their evil spells, is by inserting twigs of the indigo plant in the split ends of three sticks, spitting on the twigs, and offering a prayer for deliverance.

Much of the magic of the Karen prophets and "medicine-teachers" is concerned with recalling the "k'las" of sick persons. The multitude of demons and powers by which the tribesman believes himself to be surrounded, renders it next to impossible for him to tell which of these spirits is assailing him when he falls ill. Hence he calls in a diviner, unless he should undertake to consult the chicken bones or make marks on a bamboo, in order to determine for himself the cause of his sickness. When he has learned the cause, he makes offerings to placate the particular spirit concerned. In case his recovery is not as rapid as he thinks it ought to be, he calls in some "wi" to find out what the matter is and what he must do. The "wi" who was summoned to prescribe for a sick grandmother some years ago, inspected the chicken bones several times and, when

7 Dr. Wade, The Karen Thesaurus, new ed., Vol. I, p. 463.

19: Marshall M-5 (ca. 1910) 1922 AP1 Burma
Karen AP7

826 828

conditions being attributed to the presence of wind ("k'li"), fire ("me"), or water ("paw leh"). The elders assert that fifteen hundred cavities in the abdomen contain wind, twelve contain fire, and one contains water. The prevalence of wind over the other elements produces pride, ambition, avarice, evil desires, and hilarity. When fire is in the ascendancy, one is incited to envy, malice, hatred, and revenge. When water predominates, issuing from its single cavity, it disseminates peace, love, kindness, patience, quietness, and other allied virtues. The various qualities are intermingled in one's character in proportion to the mingling of the several elements.[9]

751 828

Many of the charms worn by both the Karen and the Burmese are intended to prevent wind from gaining the ascendency in the abdomen. Among such charms are strings of dried berries of certain plants, strings of coins that have been blown upon, and knotted cords that have been put on the wearer by elders or prophets.

757 824

Something remains to be said about the "k' thi thras" or "medicine-teachers," who compound drugs from various roots and herbs with which they practice a sort of medical lore, in addition to their occult rites. There is no doubt but that they understand the medicinal action of certain plants. They will often point out a particular tree with the remark that its leaves are good for fever or some other ailment. On my request for some prescriptions a Karen doctor gave me a hundred of them. Dr. Wade has collected over forty pages of medical formulae of various kinds, among them many of real value. Dr. Mason mentions the name of a small creeping plant *(Hydrocotyle asiatica)* which, if applied as a poultice in time, will arrest, if it does not cure, leprosy.[10] How many of these Karen prescriptions are of Burmese, Shan, or Talign origin I am unable to say. I have been told several times that the Karen who still remain in their primitive condition, depend wholly on magic and offerings to cure sickness. My observation leads me to believe that the use of medicine increases, as the people come more and more into contact with other races.

428 151 753

The Karen believe that smells have a marked effect on the body, both for good and for ill. There is hardly anything that a Karen or, indeed, a Burman fears so much as he does the smell of cooking fat ("ta neu xo"). They believe that the odor somehow enters the body, especially if there is an abrasion of the skin,

[9] *The Karen Thesaurus*, new ed., Vol. I, p. 300.
[10] Dr. F. Mason, *British Burma, Its People and Productions*, pp. 581, ff.